



consumer news

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
Office of Consumer Affairs
Virginia H. Knauer, Director

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CN Notebook: Caution

CN NOTEBOOK previously reported [CONSUMER NEWS: March 15] an energy idea from Norma Saferstein of Kansas City, MO, that may be hazardous.

She suggested sleeping on top of an electric blanket instead of under one. Many readers immediately alerted CONSUMER NEWS of the hazard of doing this. Part of a letter from G. E. Schall Jr. of Underwriters' Laboratories Inc. explains the hazard:

"Because of the wattage density incorporated in the design of an electric blanket, which is intended to be used over a person, there is a possibility that a hot spot could develop under a body lying on top of the blanket, . . . the mass of the body concentrated on top of the heating element configuration [means there is] no way for the heat to be absorbed except into the body . . ." A hot spot could cause burns.

CONSUMER NEWS regrets passing along misleading & hazardous information.

Hot news about cold water wash

Washing your clothes in cold water is one way to save money on fuel bills & to save energy. Federal Energy Office (FEO) estimates that you may save the cost & energy needed to heat up to 40 gallons of hot water for each washload.

However, some consumers have questioned whether cold water—even with a cold water detergent—is a satisfactory way to clean clothes. Should hot water be used for some things, such as diapers?

Here are some tips on the topic:

- First of all, pay attention to manufacturer's instruction (care label) for cleaning clothes. Some may recommend hot water, warm or cold water. Some may recommend machine wash or hand wash.
- Unless a care label warns not to use chlorine bleach, you might want to add that or another disinfectant to a cold water wash to help get rid of harmful bacteria.
- When there is sickness in the family—or when you are washing diapers, sheets, pajamas & other clothing soiled with human waste, blood or pus—be on the safe side. Use hot water (140°) in your washing machine to kill germs.

With these tips in mind, you usually can safely wash most clothes in cold water & not fret about harmful bacteria left on your laundry. The Public Health Service's Center for Disease Control (CDC) says the risk of spreading disease in your family is minor. Using cold water to wash socks, for example, might leave enough germs in the socks to cause athlete's foot if socks are shared (or borrowed) by children in the family. But even that risk is small.

Carpooling: some questions . . .

Emergency Highway Energy Act, which set maximum speed limit at 55 miles per hour, authorized the **Transportation Dept.** to approve projects to encourage the use of carpools in city areas as a means of saving gasoline. Projects—to be suggested by local governments—might be:

- Providing systems for locating potential riders & telling them of carpool opportunities.
- Designating existing highway lanes as special lanes for carpoolers or designating bus lanes for carpoolers.
- Providing special traffic control devices for carpool lanes.
- Using public-owned parking facilities for carpool cars.

If a local government comes up with a project to encourage carpooling, it might get up to \$1 million in Federal funds if Transportation approves the project.

What can you do? If you—individually, with friends or within a local organization—have an idea to help & encourage commuters to get to work in carpools, take your idea to your local government officials. If they like the idea, they will send it to state transportation officials. The state agency will send the idea to Transportation.

In case you are fuzzy about the whole carpool idea, CONSUMER NEWS offers the following:

QUESTION: How do I go about getting a carpool program organized?

ANSWER: First, check with your employer or school to see if there is a program already in operation. If not, ask your employer or school to take the responsibility for establishing a carpool program.

Q. Is there any help available from the Federal Government?

A. Yes. For communities, there are the project ideas mentioned above. Also, **Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)** has published a guide, *Carpool & Buspool Matching Guide*, that tells how to use a computer matching program to set up a large scale carpooling program.

Q. OK, that's fine for big cities & big corporations. What about the small company in the small town? Any help?

A. Yes, again. For small companies or groups, the grid map & information card matching techniques outlined in *Carpool & Buspool Matching Guide* would apply.

Q. Is there anyone in Washington who can answer specific questions?

A. Write to **Carpool & Buspool Matching Program**, Federal Highway Administration, Transportation Dept., Washington, DC 20590. Or call the FHWA office in your state capital.

Q. How much fuel could be saved if carpooling were widespread?

A. Twenty billion gallons could be saved each year if each commuter car carried at least 3 or 4 persons. Up to now, according to statistics, only every other car on the road is carrying someone other than the driver to or from work. In 1973, Americans pumped 115 billion gallons of gas into their cars (or pick-up trucks, vans, motorcycles & campers)—an average of 900 gallons a vehicle.

Q. If my employer, school or community does not set up a widespread carpool plan, why should I & my friends try to do it?

A. Even an increase to at least 2 persons in every commuting car would save 5 billion gallons of gas a year.

Q. Will my car insurance cover me & my carpool passengers?

A. Generally speaking, a carpool passenger is the same as any other passenger in your car & will be covered by your policy. But insurance regulations do vary from state to state. If you are joining or forming a carpool, check your policy & check with your insurance agent to be sure you & your passengers will be covered.

... & answers

- Q. If I charge my passengers a carpool fee, how will that affect my coverage?
A. As long as the fee only covers your actual costs, your insurance coverage probably will not be affected.
- Q. What effect will driver rotation have on my coverage?
A. Ordinarily, when carpool members rotate driving—you drive today, your fellow carpooler drives his car tomorrow & so on—standard insurance is applicable.
- Q. But even if I drive my car one day & someone else drives another day, will my insurance rates be affected by my being in a carpool?
A. In most cases, a person who regularly drives to work pays a 15% to 40% higher premium than someone who does not drive to work. In some cases, a person who reduces the number of days he or she drives to work through carpooling may be entitled to a rate reduction. Again, check with your insurance agent. But if you stop driving your car to work altogether, you may be entitled to lower premiums. Check your policy & check with your agent.
- Q. Other than insurance rates, can I save money by being in a carpool?
A. Yes. Estimated cost of a typical 10 mile work trip (based on studies in urban areas with population over 1 million) is \$2.64 for someone driving alone. Two in a car cuts the cost to half—\$1.32 for each. Four in a car would make the cost 66¢ each. That amounts to a \$500 savings per year per passenger compared with driving alone.
- Q. Is that all?
A. No. For long term commuter carpooling, there are other potential benefits, such as freeing the family car for use other than going back & forth to work (& spending the day in a parking lot). Or possibly, carpooling might give you the chance to sell one of the family's cars. Also, reduced mileage might allow you to extend the time between car trade-ins.
- Q. Are there any "catches?"
A. Can't think of any. But here are some additional benefits of carpooling: (1) less highway & street congestion, (2) reduction in air pollution caused by auto emissions, (3) possibly less personal strain in "fighting the traffic" every day & (4) possibly new friendships with fellow carpoolers.

What do you think of DST?

Transportation Dept. wants to know consumer opinion of Daylight Saving Time (DST). The Emergency Daylight Saving Time Energy Conservation Act of 1973, which set the nation on DST in January of this year, requires Transportation to report to Congress about the effects of year-round DST. (Congress passed the law as a means of saving energy, especially by reducing electric power used for lighting.)

You can help Transportation prepare its report by sending your comments on DST to Miss Antonina P. Ucello, Director, Office of Consumer Affairs, Transportation Dept., Washington, DC 20590. In particular, express your views on the following:

- Whether DST helped you save energy.
- DST's effects on traffic safety, including the safety of children going to & from school.
- Change of school hours because of DST.

Briefly:

Frozen corn Here is a shopping tip from Agriculture Dept.: Do not buy frozen corn if the package is damp or wet; this is a sign that corn may be defrosting. Also, watch for a layer of ice on the package, which may show that the corn was defrosted & later refrozen. Defrosting & refreezing lowers the flavor & texture of frozen corn.

Clothes The energy shortage may send us back to nature for our fabric choices, says Agriculture Dept. Since most synthetic fibers are made from petroleum by-products, you may in time see fewer manmade fibers but more cotton & wool for clothing & other purposes.

Warnings!

• **TOY CHESTS**—Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) advises parents to stop letting their children use a toy chest made by Jackson Furniture Corp., Jackson, TN. While getting toys out of the chest—or putting them away—a child could get his head caught between the front of the chest & its top. Forty stores have sold the chests, including Sears, Roebuck & Co. through its catalog. Sears' chests have a padded 3-inch top come in 3 colors: yellow, orange & walnut finish with designs of lambs & daisies. Sears' catalog listed the chest as model 88063, 88064 88065. Other stores have sold the same kind of chest except for a pale yellow frame with sides & top decorations in a series of white, green & yellow circles & stars. The name of Jackson Furniture Corp. is on a label inside the chest. The shipping carton had the stock number 9023. CPSC advises parents to return the Jackson chest to Sears or any other store that sold it. Parents will receive a full refund.

• **VOLKSWAGENS**—National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) warns owners of certain Volkswagens that lap & shoulder belts may be so weakened by battery acid contamination that the belts could be useless for crash protection. The condition may occur in all Type I (Beetles) & Type III VW's made 1968 through 1972. Accumulated battery acid may attack safety belts in these models when owners do not store the belts in the storage "clips" along the upper roof edge or when the rear seat belts are stuffed down behind the seat. Since the storage battery in these models is under the right rear seat cushion, overfilling the battery or battery leakage may result in accumulations of acid on the car floor. Its corrosive action affects any material in contact with the acid, including clothing & skin. Proper storage of unused safety belts & proper maintenance of batteries can prevent this kind of belt damage.

TRUCKS—National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) warns owners of 1971 & 1972 Chevrolet & GMC pickup trucks that it has received & verified a number of reports of tie-rod failures, caused by separation of tie-rod's ball-&-socket connection to front wheels. A tie-rod is a crucial element of a steering system. Failure may result in loss of steering & truck control. Owners of these trucks (models C-10, G-10 & P-10 for 1971-72 Chevrolet pickups & models C-1500, G-1500 & P-1500 for 1971-72 GMC pickups) should be alert for any looseness in steering & should have tie-rod inspected immediately if looseness continues. NHTSA advises regular inspection for these models & urges immediate replacement of worn or faulty parts. Owners of any 1971-72 General Motors Corp. pickup truck should report any tie-rod failures to NHTSA. Include conditions under which failure occurred, threat to safety, make, model year & serial number. Send reports to Office of Consumer Affairs (N40-4), Transportation Dept., Washington, DC 20590.

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